jake mc carthy

a personal opinion

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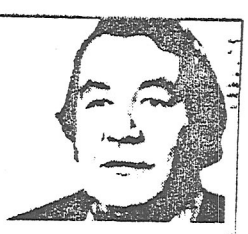

New Ray Trial?

Mark Lane, an attorney of national stature, has taken on the James Earl Ray case and is determined to try to get him a new trial on charges that Ray assassinated the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Ray, as reported here in the past, has admitted being in Memphis on the fatal day, renting a room in the boarding house from which the shot was fired, and buying a gun for a man he knew only as Raoul. But he claims he was absent from the house at the time of the killing, and was "set up" for the rap.

As reported in the last column, a woman named Grace Walden claims to have been one of two persons who saw the killer as he fled from the house, the other being her roommate at the time, Charlie Stephens. But Stephens by the government's own admission was in "an intoxicated state." Grace Walden's description does not match that of James Earl Ray. After his arrest, she said, "that's not the man." She was confined to a mental institution two days after Ray's arrest and remained there for 10 years, until Lane recently obtained her release.

But to get a new trial, the California-based Lane told me on a visit to St. Louis the other day, he must mobilize pressure upon the government. He outlined his plan to me.

On Aug. 16, he said, James Earl Ray will testify before the House subcommittee on assassinations. "He will give no more secret testimony," Lane said. "This will be the first time ever that Ray has been able to speak publicly. He has also said that he wants the right to confront his accusers, but I doubt if they will let him."

In addition, Lane said, a national Committee for Truth and Justice in the killing of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., has been formed. Members of the committee include such prominent black spokesmen as the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Dick Gregory and Benjamin Hooks, executive director of the NAACP. "It has only one point on its agenda," said Lane, "to demand a trial for James Earl Ray."

About the time of the Aug. 16 hearing, Lane went on, a delegation from the committee will try to see President Carter and make the point that failure to support a new trial for James Earl Ray would violate Carter's own worldwide campaign for human rights.

Further, said Lane, black religious leaders from all over the country will assemble in Memphis in October in a "week for justice in Tennessee" to demand a new trial for Ray.

If that doesn't work, Lane said, the committee plans next year to conduct a nationwide boycott of products made in Tennessee.

Mark Lane does not attempt to conceal his belief that the FBI and/or the CIA has some curious stake in stopping any further investigation into the assassination of Dr. King.

"When the House assassination committee began its work, Dick Sprague was its counsel and went down to talk to James Earl Ray. Ray thought he might finally have a chance to get his story told," Lane said. "But then Sprague was forced out and so was his staff. Then a rule was adopted that all new hires had to be cleared with the FBI and the CIA first. The prime suspects," he charged, "are picking the investigators."

In several previous columns, I have reported some of the strange circumstances surrounding the King assassination. The other day, Lane outlined some more.

"There wasn't any way that James Earl Ray could have known that Dr. King would be at the Lorraine Hotel that day. Newspaper columns reported that he would be staying at the Holiday Inn. At the last minute," Lane said, "the special agent in charge of the FBI office in Memphis arranged for Dr. King to stay at the Lorraine."

Further, he said, the FBI has claimed that it had no surveillance on Dr. King at the time of the killing. "Now it has come to light that the FBI was even watching Dr. King when he was in Oslo, Norway."

There was some mysterious "time off" given to certain law enforcement officers at the time of the killing, Lane contends. There were, apparently, two "white Mustangs." And Lane played for me a tape in which an FBI agent maintains that his superior officer "jumped with joy" at word of the killing of Dr. King. This superior officer later was second in command of the investigation into the slaying.

Mark Lane was one of the first to raise questions about the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Now he has turned his attention to Martin Luther King, and the questions he raises deserve a public airing.

The times that led to Watergate were also strange times of political assassination in which ominous traces of conspiracy were left strewn about in Dallas and Memphis and Los Angeles. A free society ought not be satisfied, where Dr. King and the FBI are concerned, until James Earl Ray has a bona-fide day in court, something Lee Harvey Oswald never had the chance to get.